

# In the WEST INDIES

## The Greater Antilles

WHEN the Board of National Missions speaks of its work in the West Indies, it refers to Cuba, Santo Domingo, and Puerto Rico, as it is in these islands only, known as the Greater Antilles, that the Board conducts enterprises.

Because of the dissimilarities of certain conditions on the three islands, it is necessary in writing a resumé of the work to consider each island separately; yet their similarities, such as like climatic conditions, the use of a common language, the background and temperament of their peoples, and common needs and reactions, make them distinctly a "group" project.

## Assets and Liabilities

CUBA, the largest of the three islands, in size slightly smaller than the state of Pennsylvania, has a total population of 3,763,375, a density of about eighty-nine to the square mile. It is an island of cities and small towns, with few good roads throughout the rural areas.

It is rich in tropical vegetation and all fruits and vegetables grow in abundance. Although capable of producing practically all foodstuffs necessary for home consumption, it has always depended upon other countries for such articles. In 1925 it imported some \$43,800,000 worth of food products from the United States alone. This decreased in 1931 to \$9,930,000. Although the largest sugar producer in the world, since 1921 Cuba has suffered an annual deficit on its sugar exports. Less than two decades ago it was one of the richest per capita countries in the world. Today, because of the sugar tariff and the world depression, many of its population know actual want and privation. It is also staggering under the taxes imposed for the financing of the seven hundred and five mile highway built through the center of the island as well as of the building of the national capitol.

Another of Cuba's problems the past year has been the revolution organized against the government. The government forces discovered the movement, captured its leaders and confiscated the war supplies. But a state of unrest has existed about the island which makes it difficult to maintain satisfactory order. The University and high schools have remained closed.

PUERTO RICO, only some 3,435 square miles in area, is less than one-twelfth the size of Cuba, about half the size of New Jersey, yet its population is 1,543,913, nearly four hundred fifty to the square mile. The island,

which is mountainous and picturesque, is only ninety-five miles long from east to west and thirty-five miles wide with a coast line of 345 miles. Unlike Cuba, it is an island of well-built roads connecting almost all points. The soil, extremely fertile, is largely under cultivation.

The poorer classes of Puerto Rico are in great need of help, due to causes that grow out of over-population and the hurricanes which in recent years have visited Puerto Rico in such rapid succession. In 1932 a second hurricane followed so closely in the wake of that of 1928 that its devastating effects were keenly felt. Not only did it destroy additional homes of the poor, but it added to the burdens of the victims of the previous storm.

The climate of Puerto Rico is considered the most healthful of the Western Hemisphere in the tropics. Yet because of the extreme poverty of the poorer classes, there is much disease, malnutrition, tuberculosis, yaws, etc. However, vast improvements, both economically and socially, have been made in the last decade. The death rate, which was 36.5 in 1927-8, was only 18.6 in 1930-31.

Education in Puerto Rico is free and compulsory, yet less than one-half of the children of school age are enrolled in the 2,250 public schools. The number of illiterate on the island is practically 41 per cent.

Puerto Rico has also had disturbing political problems. During the year national elections were held, which resulted in a complete turnover of authority, the greatest change in political affairs for many years. Such a change of leadership, no matter what may be its effect upon the future, could not possibly be other than upsetting at its inception.

THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC, with an area of 19,325 square miles, approximately the size of Virginia, and an estimated population of 1,200,000, is greatly underpopulated. Its population density is approximately sixty-two to the square mile. The soil of this island is very fertile and about 15,500 square miles are cultivable.

Santo Domingo was also the victim of a hurricane in 1930. Yet despite the devastation of this storm and the general effects of the world depression, there has been less of actual want there than in the other two islands.

Santo Domingo, too, has had political difficulties. The present administration has been pushing a program of reconstruction of roads and the reorganization of public institutions, which has resulted in huge tax assessments. The people of Santo Domingo are insistent that an improvement be made in its educational system, and point to the fact that out of 300,000 children of school age, only some 60,000 are receiving instruction at the present time. Yet a much larger appropriation, proportionately, is made for the upkeep of the army than for the educational program.

Church, School, and Hospital

Summary

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DESPITE the disturbing and deplorable economic and political conditions which have hindered the progress of the three islands in the past year, the Church has gone forward in a remarkable way. In the attitude of the missionaries toward those in political authority and their sympathetic assistance to those in distress, regardless of creed, they have won the respect both of the people and those in power. The pastor and community worker, as well as the hospital, have found unlimited opportunities to minister to hundreds of people who in the past could not have been reached. Much relief work, seriously needed, has been organized by missionary workers; and food and clothing, made possible by the gifts of friends and business groups, have been dispensed to the poor. The fact that no preference was given to any particular creed did not escape the notice and appreciation of the people. Mission churches have, through various clubs and organizations, aided the poor in and about parish areas. Especially have the churches served the people when a particular difficulty has befallen them. For instance, it was the church which took the leadership in the distribution of food and clothing, as well as in caring for the injured and homeless, at the time of the Mayaguez flood. The same was true when the hurricane of 1932 swept Puerto Rico so closely following the storm of 1928. The Presbyterian Hospital at San Juan filled every nook and corner with the injured, and doctors and nurses went into outlying districts ministering to the sick and wounded wherever possible.

The encouraging feature in the work of National Missions is the spiritual awakening in the three islands in the face of reduced budgets and other disturbing factors. Under the joint leadership of the Board of Christian Education and the Board of National Missions over a hundred young people gathered



at the Polytechnic Institute of Puerto Rico last summer for the first young people's conference ever held there. For various reasons the number of delegates selected was limited to two for each church and Sunday school, but from the many available it became evident that if there had been accommodations, a thousand could have been sent from the Presbyterian churches alone. Other denominations have interested themselves in this movement, and are requesting that their young people be allowed to attend from areas where the Presbyterian church is not located.

ALTHOUGH the number of workers has been reduced at a time of the greatest demand upon the personnel, no enterprise has been neglected. Missionary workers have redoubled their efforts and extended their services in many directions. This is true of new as well as seasoned workers. A young man in Puerto Rico who was graduated from the Seminary last spring, for whom the new budget could make no provision, suggested to his presbytery that he be permitted to take a field for whatever it might pay him, which will probably be \$15 per month or less. In order to meet the situation in Santo Domingo, where the various denominations function under the Board for Christian Work in Santo Domingo, it was decided that rent allowances must be discontinued in that Republic. This has made it necessary for the field to furnish all buildings for church work and the homes of pastors; although this has worked great hardship, the situation has been met without a complaint. This is the attitude of missionaries on the three islands. "Whatever financial adjustments must be made, the work must go on," they say. Three young Cubans who were graduated from the Evangelical Seminary of Puerto Rico last year found upon returning to Cuba that the financial situation made it impossible for them to be engaged on salary. Asking no remuneration, they began work immediately. By the time an adjustment could be made by which they might be paid salaries, their program was well begun. One of these young men faced the necessity of repairing and enlarging the chapel in the district in which he volunteered his services. Knowing that little if any of the money necessary would be available, he went about the country asking for whatever assistance might be offered. His success so far exceeded expectations that the Board sent the small balance needed, and the chapel was enlarged to meet the needs of a growing congregation.

Cuba has long felt that there were many willing to come into the church if only the proper approach were made. With this end in view, the pastors conducted what they termed an "evangelistic crusade" this past year, with results exceeding their highest hopes. Many churches had more candidates than the pastors could properly instruct. Because of the fact that Puerto Rico is so largely a rural country, the character of the work conducted there must necessarily be adapted to meet the needs. Under the direction of Dr. Santiago-Cabrera, "tent evangelism" has been carried on for some years with gratifying results. The response of the rural peoples to this well-organized form of evangelization has been one of the outstanding phases of the work in Puerto Rico. Pastors who are assigned to churches are attempting to cover these fields in addition to their own work, but it will be impossible for them to meet the demands of a growing constituency.

Because of the closing for political reasons of Cuba's University and high schools, National Missions schools have had to take on additional burdens; yet at the same time they have been permitted a freedom in their programs not



possible heretofore. Today the Kate Plumer Bryan School at Guines, for instance, is able to carry out a program to meet "personal and community problems." It reports: "The whole trend of our program is to meet personal and community problems which have become acute since 1926 when the depression began with the fall of the sugar market. Perhaps our greatest achievement has been the gradual winning of large numbers of parents to our ideal of preparing boys and girls for life's emergencies rather than for white-collar or professional tasks only, which up to this time has been their only aim."

The program at La Progresiva in Cardenas for the past year is illustrative of the effort of all these schools to break away from the old idea of book learning and to make each a center of Christian community service in the widest possible sense. A bare list of some of the activities here includes the following: night schools conducted in Cardenas and adjoining towns to teach English and simple commercial work; the school playground and swimming pool opened to the community under the supervision of older students; a three weeks' evening lecture course in Spanish literature given by a prominent professor from the University; a second primary day school opened at Campinas, in a needy district of Cardenas; a truckload of clothing, food, and bedding sent, in cooperation with the local church, to the sufferers from the disastrous flood in Camaguey province; and the school property loaned during the summer for a Young People's Conference to which came delegates from churches all over Cuba.

**T**HE economic stress during the past year has also added to the duties of the staff of the Presbyterian Hospital in San Juan, Puerto Rico, while at the same time opening marvelous opportunities for service and for reaching many new people. Unfortunately up to the present time plans for the alteration and enlargement of the Presbyterian Hospital, largely from funds given for that purpose, have not been begun, although it is hoped this work may be completed shortly. If this additional space were available, a greater number of needy patients could be cared for, thereby increasing the opportunities for spreading the gospel message. This hospital fills a very great need especially at this time when the large Municipal Hospital in Santurce is operating at only half capacity, and many smaller hospitals about the island are closed entirely. One of the most interesting cooperative activities of the hospital the past year is that with the University of Puerto Rico, which is sending its student dietitians to the hospital for practical training in planning and following up special diets, etc.

No better illustration can be found of the part which a mission institution can play in pioneering and in the development of leadership and standards for public service than the account of the growth of the Nurses' Training School at the Presbyterian Hospital given in a recent letter from one of the staff:

"The early student nurses came in spite of opposition with very little educational background but as the years have passed nursing has gained a place in Puerto Rico among the women of education. Now we have no difficulty in making up a class of students who enter with four years of high school as preparation, or even some college work. For instance, we had ninety-nine applications for the class which we took in last fall. We admitted twenty-nine students all of whom had completed high school. Now 91½ per cent of the present student body of forty-seven students have completed their high school work and 14½ per cent of the present enrollment have had one to four years of college work in addition. The attracting of college women to the profession of nursing in

Puerto Rico will mean much to the advance of the profession in the next few years."

The Hospital Internacional of the Board for Christian Work in Santo Domingo has had an especially busy year. The number of patients per day almost doubled over the previous year. In addition, during a period of malaria, extension work was carried on in three outside clinics. The Nurses' Training School is now full to capacity, and the nurses all made excellent records in the government examinations the past year, thereby winning anew recognition of the high professional standards of this institution.

## "What Would Happen?"

**W**HAT would happen to our work in the West Indies if the Board were compelled to withdraw its support?" some one recently asked Dr. E. A. Odell, Secretary for West Indies Work. "I have studied the field with that question in mind, since it has so often been asked," Dr. Odell replied. "My answer is: It would go on." Dr. Odell explained by saying that native workers have proved their ability and eagerness to carry on in the face of all discouragements, and that in Cuba, for instance, notwithstanding the severe economic condition, many churches have contributed more toward self-support and benevolences than ever before. "The reduction of our budget does not endanger the continuance of our work," Dr. Odell continued. "It does something more to be avoided. It adds a very great hardship to those already burdened. It leaves our associates to labor alone and unaided in a field where with our cooperation a task can be well done and the extension of Christ's Kingdom hastened. It is cold comfort to know that these noble-hearted people with whom we have joined hands in a great task are willing to do their part at any sacrifice if we fail to do our part. They have not failed; and we must not."

## How to Help Extend the Work in the West Indies

- \$1,000 to \$1,800 will support a native pastor with the help of the local church.
- \$400 will build a rural chapel.
- \$300 will pay the expenses of tent evangelism for one year.
- \$250 will pay the expenses of a candidate for the ministry in the Union Theological Seminary (Evangelical Seminary) of Puerto Rico.
- \$120 will maintain a hospital bed at the Presbyterian Hospital, San Juan.
- \$100 will purchase a horse for a rural missionary.
- \$25 will pay for a month's medical attendance, including drugs, at Marina Neighborhood House.
- \$5-\$10 will do all sorts of interesting things.

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